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THE SONG OF DEIRDRA
KING BYRGE AND HIS BROTHERS
AND
OTHER BALLADS

BY
GEORGE BORROW

LONDON :
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THE SONG OF DEIRDRA

FAREWELL, grey Albyn, much loved land,
I ne'er shall see thy hills again ;
Upon those hills I oft would stand
And view the chase sweep o'er the plain.

'Twas pleasant from their tops I ween
To see the stag that bounding ran ;
And all the rout of hunters keen,
The sons of Usna in the van.

The chiefs of Albyn feasted high,
Amidst them Usna's children shone ;
And Nasa kissed in secrecy
The daughter fair of high Dundron.

To her a milk-white doe he sent,
With little fawn that frisked and played
And once to visit her he went,
As home from Inverness he strayed.

The news was scarcely brought to me
When jealous rage inflamed my mind ;
I took my boat and rushed to sea,
For death, for speedy death, inclined.

But swiftly swimming at my stern
Came Ainlie bold and Ardan tall ;
Those faithful striplings made me turn
And brought me back to Nasa's hall.

Then thrice he swore upon his arms,
His burnished arms, the foeman's bane,
That he would never wake alarms
In this fond breast of mine again.

Dundron's fair daughter also swore,
And called to witness earth and sky,
That since his love for her was o'er
A maiden she would live and die.

Ah did she know that slain in fight,
He wets with gore the Irish hill,
How great would be her moan this night,
But greater far would mine be still.

THE DIVER

A BALLAD TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

“ WHERE is the man who will dive for his King,
In the pool as it rushes with turbulent sweep ?
A cup from this surf-beaten jetty I fling,
And he who will seek it below in the deep,
And will bring it again to the light of the day,
As the meed of his valour shall bear it away.

“ Now courage, my knights, and my warriors bold,
For, one, two, and three, and away it shall go—”
He toss’d, as he said it, the goblet of gold
Deep, deep in the howling abysses below.—
‘ Where is the hero who ventures to brave
The whirl of the pool, and the break of the
wave? ’”

The steel-coated lancemen, and nobles around,
Spoke not, but they trembled in silent surprise,
And pale they all stood on the cliff's giddy bound,
And no one would venture to dive for the prize.
"Three times have I spoke, but no hero will spring
And dive for the goblet, and dive for the King."

But still they were silent and pale as before,
Till a brave son of Eirin, in venturous pride,
Dash'd forth from the lancemen's trembling corps
And canted his helm, cast his mantle aside,
While spearman, and noble, and lady, and knight,
Gazed on the bold stripling in breathless affright.

Unmoved by the thoughts of his horrible doom,
He mounted the cliff—and he paus'd on his leap,
For the waves which the pool had imbibed in its
womb

Were spouted in thunder again from the deep,—
Yes ! as they return'd, their report was as loud
As the peal when it bursts from the storm-riven
cloud.

It roared, and it drizzled, it hiss'd and it whirl'd,
And it bubbled like water when mingled with
 flame,
And columns of foam to the heaven were hurl'd,
And billow on billow tumultuously came ;
It seem'd that the womb of the ocean would bear
Sea over sea to the uppermost air.

It thundered again as the wave gather'd slow,
And black from the drizzling foam as it fell,
The mouth of the fathomless tunnel below
Was seen like the pass to the regions of hell ;
The waters roll round it, and gather and boom,
And then all at once disappear in the gloom.

And now ere the waves had returned from the
 deep,
The youth wiped the sweat-drops which hung on
 his brows,
And he plunged—and the cataracts over him
 sweep,
And a shout from his terrified comrades arose ;
And then there succeeded a horrible pause
For the whirlpool had clos'd its mysterious jaws.

And stiller it grew on the watery waste,
In the womb of the ocean it bellow'd alone,
The knights said their Aves in terrified haste,
And crowded each pinnacle, jetty, and stone :
“ The high-hearted stripling is whelm'd in the
 tide,
Ah ! wail him,” was echoed from every side.

“ If the monarch had buried his crown in the pool
And said : ‘ He shall wear it who brings it again,’
I would not have been so insensate a fool
As to dive when all hope of returning were vain ;
What heaven conceals in the gulfs of the deep,
Lies buried for ever, and there it must sleep.”

Full many a burden the whirlpool had borne,
And spouted it forth on the drizzling surge,
But nought but a mast that was splinter'd and
 torn,
Or the hull of a vessel was seen to emerge ;
But wider and wider it opens its jaws,
And louder it gurgles, and louder it draws.

It drizzled, it thunder'd, it hiss'd and it whirl'd,
And it bubbled like water when mingled with
 flame,
And columns of foam to the heaven were hurl'd,
And flood upon flood from the deep tunnel came ;
And then with a noise like the storm from the
 North,
The hellish eruption was vomited forth.

But, ah ! what is that on the wave's foamy brim,
Disgorged with an ocean of wreck and of wood ?
'Tis the snow-white arm and the shoulder of him
Who daringly dived for the glittering meed :
'Tis he, 'tis the stripling so hardy and bold,
Who swings in his left hand the goblet of gold.

He draws a long breath as the breaker he leaves,
Then swims through the water with many a
 strain,
While all his companions exultingly heave
Their voices above the wild din of the main :
“ 'Tis he, O ! 'tis he, from the horrible hole
The brave one has rescued his body and soul.”

He reach'd the tall jetty, and kneeling he laid
The massy gold goblet in triumph and pride
At the foot of the monarch, who instantly made
A sign to his daughter who stood by his side :
She fill'd it with wine, and the youth with a spring
Received it, and quaff'd it, and turn'd to the King.

“Long life to the monarch ! how happy are
they

Who breathe and exist in the sun's rosy light,
But he who is doom'd in the ocean to stray,
Views nothing around him but horror and night ;
Let no one henceforward be tempted like me
To pry in the secrets contain'd in the sea.

I felt myself seized, with the quickness of thought
The whirlpool entomb'd me in body and limb,
And billow on billow tumultuously brought
It's cataracts o'er me ; in vain did I swim,
For like a mere pebble with horrible sound
The force of the double stream twisted me
round.

But God in his mercy, for to him alone
In the moment of danger I ever have clung,
Did bear me towards a projection of stone :
I seized it in transport, and round it I hung,
The goblet lay too on a corally ledge,
Which jutted just over the cataract's edge.

And then I look'd downward, and horribly deep,
And twinkling sheen in the darkness below,
And though to the hearing it ever might sleep,
Yet still the eye clouded with terror might know,
That serpents and creatures that made my blood
cool,

Were swimming and splashing about in the pool.

Ball'd up to a mass, in a moment uncoil'd,
They rose, and again disappear'd in the dark,
And down in the billows which over them boil'd
I saw a behemoth contend with a shark ;
The sounds of their hideous duel awaken
The black-bellied whale, and the slumbering
craken.

Still, still did I linger forlorn, and oppress'd
With a feeling of terror that curdled my blood ;
Ah think of a human and sensible breast
Enclosed with the hideous shapes of the flood ;
Still, still did I linger, but far from the reach
Of those that I knew would await on the beach.

Methought that a serpent towards me did creep,
And trailing behind him whole fathoms of length,
He open'd his jaws; and I dropp'd from the
steep

Round which I had clung with expiring strength :
'Twas well that I did so, the stream bore me up,
And here is thy servant, and there is the cup."

He then was retiring, a look from the King
Detain'd him : " My hero, the cup is thine own,
'Tis richly thy meed, but I'll give thee this
ring,

Beset with a diamond and chrysolite stone,
If again thou wilt dive, and discover to me
What's hid in the deepest abyss of the sea."

The daughter heard that with compassionate
thought,

Quick, quick to the feet of the monarch she flew :

“ O father, desist from this horrible sport,
He has done what no other would venture to do,
If the life of a creature thou fain must destroy,
Let a noble take place of this generous boy.”

The monarch has taken the cup in his hand,
And tumbled it down in the bellowing sea :

“And if thou canst bring it again to the strand,
The first, and the best of my knights thou shalt be ;
If that will not tempt thee, this maid thou shalt
wed,

And share as a husband the joys of her bed.”

Then the pride of old Eirin arose in his look,
And it flash'd from his eye-balls courageously
keen,

One glance on the beautiful vision he took,
And he saw her change colour, and sink on the
green.

“By the stool of Saint Peter the prize I'll obtain ;”
He shouted, and instantly dived in the main.

The waters sunk down, and a thundering peal
Announced that the time of their sojourn was
o'er ;

Each eye is cast downward in terrified zeal,
As forth from the tunnel the cataracts pour.
The waters rush up, and the waters subside ;
But ah ! the bold diver remains in the tide.

KING BYRGE AND HIS BROTHERS

DAME INGEBORG three brave brothers could
boast,

For the crown of Sweden their lives they lost.

The nobles to Sweden would fain away,
Dame Ingeborg bade them at home to stay.

Dame Ingeborg stood at Helsingborg's gate,
“Dear brothers, go not, I beg and entreat!”

Then with one voice the brothers cried :
“We've long for our realms paternal sighed.

“And we have too long with thee remained,
Our hearts within us are sorely pained.”

“Five days with me, dear brothers, wait,
Whilst I my dreadful dream relate.

“Methought that your mantles were of lead,
With them, dear brothers, ye were arrayed.

“They were fast tied about your throats,
And treachery towards ye that denotes.”

To Dame Ingeborg's rede no ear they lent,
But to Sweden that very same day they went.

And when they had won to the sand beach
white,

There met them Brouk, that faithless knight.

“Ye brothers both, thrice welcome be,
Ye'll come and drink Yule with His Majesty?”

The nobles repair to Nykoping street,
There they a deceitful counsel meet.

“Now off your bodies your armour lay,
And hie to the castle in court dress gay.”

In at the doorway the nobles stepped,
Up to receive them the monarch leapt.

“My dear brothers both, thrice welcome be,
Will ye drink Yule with our Majesty?”

With his brothers down sate King Byrge to
food,

Much serious discourse betwixt them ensued.

“Now welcome, my brothers, thrice welcome
I say,

May I not alone the country sway?”

“May God to our brother grant happiness,
But he cannot alone the land to possess.”

The nobles they ate and they drank for a trice,
Brouk has discovered another device :

“What will ye now do, ye worshipful knights,
Have drinking and dancing for ye delights?”

Then they danced out and danced in with glee,
And Brouk the clear wine poured so free.

On the floor stood the nobles and 'gan to sing,
Whilst Brouk proceeded to plot with the King.

Then unto his brother Duke Valdemar said :

“O Erik, we drink too much wine, I'm afraid.

“Be we on our guard ’gainst Brouk’s pleasantries,
He knoweth all manner of villanies.”

Duke Erik held up his good right hand :
“Shall we fear aught in our fatherland ?

“We are come with a safety assurance fair,
And of no quarrel are we aware.”

They drank and they danced till the day had
ta’en flight,
Then illumined was torch and big wax light.

To hie now to bed the nobles desired,
And repose on the bolsters their bodies tired.

Then in to the prison tower they were led,
The King himself went in his cloak of red.

They thought that in jest the thing was done,
’Till he slammed the doors to every one.

Manlike fought Erik and scorned to yield,
As long as he’d sword or a post to wield.

Broke sword ! broke post ! they no more could
defend !

Into prison they naked were forced to wend.

The noble brothers suffered sore,
From frost and from cold and from hunger
much more.

“ We'll give thee, Brouk, the gold so red,
If thou'lt give us but water and bread.”

“ Ye shall not obtain in Sweden here,
Or bread or water your hearts to cheer.”

“ Our dear brother's wife we are confident,
To let us be starved will ne'er consent.

“ We know the Queen has a pitying breast,
She will straw send us whereon to rest.

“ The hunger within us is sharp and strong,
Our hearts must certainly burst ere long.”

Then Brouk at that word so wrathful grew,
The keys he into the salt fiord threw.

Tw'as dismal to hear how with hunger they roared,
Each others shoulders they devoured.

And there is yet more woe to relate,
The flesh from the sides of each other they ate.

Much misery and woe there was that tide,
In each other's arms the brothers died.

And thus things stood till five months were fled,
King Byrge came home from the war-field red.

“Now whither departed are brothers mine?
Why didst thou not give them their fill of
wine?”

Then answered straight the little child:
“Brouk into the tower the nobles beguiled.”

King Byrge peeped in the window through,
The state of the brothers was piteous to view.

“Now hear thou, Brouk, straight to me declare,
Where the prison keys are I gave to thy care?”

"May the blessed Christ my soul ne'er save,
If I cast them not in the briny wave."

"O Brouk, shame fall thy head upon,
So evilly towards me thou has done.

"Thou fool and villain ! I've lost thereby
The keys to Sweden's sovereignty."

"If I have betrayed thy brothers twain,
Thou mayest alone over Sweden reign."

That deed such grief to the Dukes' friends gave,
And that grief they carried to the grave.

With his Queen King Byrge must fly from his
 throne,
Beheaded was Magnus, his beautiful son.

But Brouk to the infamous wheel was consigned,
May all such traitors a like end find !

When sovereigns many there are to a land,
You'll never see them go hand in hand.

The one 'fore the other must certainly fall,
Not seldom destruction comes o'er them all.

Though fraud and deceit for a time have
 success,
At length on their owner they'll bring distress.

TURKISH HYMN TO MAHOMET

O ENVOY of Allah, to thee be salaam,
With my whole heart I love thee, O blest be thy
name.

At the high throne of God thou for sinners dost
plead

Who forgives for thy sake each iniquitous deed.
O Prophet of Allah, for all that I've done
Of rebellion against Him, tis thou must atone.
For Thou art the one intercessor, Thou, Thou—
The prince of the prophets to whom the rest
bow.

In the world's Judgment Day when all nations
are met,

When good deeds and bad in the balance are
set,

Intercession I hope for, from Thee, only Thee,
So breathe intercession for me, wretched me.

'Tis true my misdeeds I'm unable to count,
But I know that thy goodness exceeds their
amount.

Like one who's defunct I a long time have been,
My body is drowned in an ocean of sin.
My rebellions they be of so dreadful a die
That to wend to my Maker no courage have I.
Now save I in dust at thy feet myself throw,
And thy footstool I strike with my agonis'd
brow ;

And save thou for me dost benignantly speak,
What for me will remain but despairing to shriek ?
For unless I thy kind intercession procure,
My soul with the Kaffirs will torments endure.
But I trust thou wilt that for thy servant employ'
And that rest I shall gain, and unspeakable joy.
Unto thee without end shall be praises and
prayers,

And also to them, thy disciples and heirs,
The voyagers noble who trod the true road,
And to others the path of salvation who show'd,
The four eldest friends of exalted degree
Who of our religion the four pillars be.

First of all the good King of the Kingdom of
Grace,
The just Abon Bekir with truth in his face ;
The next the stout lion so bravely who warr'd,
The Lyon of the Mussulman, Omar my Lord.
The third a high Emir, renowned midst our
clan,
The child of the moment, the Emir Othman.
The fourth of the pillars, my Lord Ali dear,
Inspector acute of the dark and the clear.
Then the light of our eyes, the delectable twain,
The Lovely Prince Hassan, the Emir Hoseyn.
Nor unnoticed by men shall be suffered to pass
Those excellent uncles, Hanozah and Abbess.
Unto each of that band be a thousand salaams,
An bless'd through all ages be each of their
names.

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